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COMMUNITY  
MEDIA REVIEW

# Youth & Media

The Journal of the  
**Alliance for Community Media**

Volume 19, No. 5



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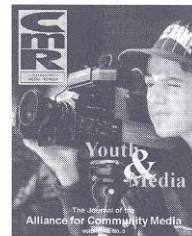


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Youth & Media Resources Around the Country



# Helping Our Youth Become More than Consumer Fodder

by Alan Bushong

**W**e owe our youth better media than we have today—media that molds them into consumer fodder. This thought motivates many of us in community media daily, and with good reason.

We are daily living the legacy of transforming an amazing technology into what has been called the “vast wasteland.” While perhaps an intellectual wasteland, TV has very efficiently been molded by corporate America into a powerful and pervasive sales tool. As a result, TV is used to sell goods, services and political candidates with little concern for information and education and a lot of concern for profits.

As one media activist put it, commercial television is used to deliver the audience to the marketer. The product is the audience. I mean no disrespect to businesses, many of which improve quality of life. At the same time, life and business are not synonymous, and I am not interested in being delivered to the market.

Our youth are a prime target. They watch, they imprint, and they buy. They have long lives ahead of them—very attractive to marketers such as the cigarette industry. Youth are impressionable. Their self-esteem can be challenged and dented. They are the new frontier.

Equally appalling is a look at real-life situations ignored or downplayed by the commercial media. A study group recently reported that 22% of American youth live in poverty, and that 25%—an astounding 13 million youth—are hungry. That’s one in four, hungry today, in the greatest democracy in the world, in the land of opportunity.

We don’t often hear such depressing news. It’s hard to sell soap or beer or cars while casually dismissing the misery of young people.

How much better to talk about jobs and the Dow Jones breaking 6,000. Even NPR chants its stock index mantra on the half hour. It’s no wonder that so many people with so little—or nothing at all—in the stock market have come to accept the Dow Jones index as the prime quality of life indicator. Just for some perspective, those of us with retirement plans based on stocks are part of the “bottom” 80% of participants who own 2% of stock wealth. The top 5% own 77% of this wealth.

At election time, candidates recite their own mantras about the importance of education: youth are our future, they are a good investment. So why is one in four of the investment hungry?

How long would 25% of America’s youth be hungry if we heard a poverty or hunger index every thirty minutes? Or if the same people with an investment in stocks were to convert their interest to an investment in youth—especially the top 5% of

investors?

Every day the media are with us, our surrogate friends and neighbors, letting us know just how great our system is, or how dangerous our community is or what to think in general. The **Society for the Eradication of Television** just published their list of reasons to get rid of TV. This information is scary, including:

- ✓ the average child will watch more than 200,000 commercials before high school graduation—the average viewer sees 18,000 commercials annually
- ✓ TV is on seven hours a day in the average American home, 99.5% of which have TVs
- ✓ the average child will spend more time watching TV than in the classroom by the end of high school
- ✓ the average American will spend nine years watching TV by age 65

The time lost to TV viewing, primarily in a passive, non-social context is frightening. So are the content of the programs and the unwillingness to stop.

- ✓ by age 14, a child will see 11,000 murders on TV
- ✓ there are an average of 18 violent acts per hour on children’s weekend programs; pre-school kids show “unwarranted aggressive behavior” after watching TV
- ✓ a Detroit paper offered \$500 to 120 families to turn off TV for month; 93 said no

- ✓ kids show classic drug withdrawal symptoms when their families kick the TV habit
- ✓ when asked to choose between TV and their fathers, over half of the kids surveyed chose TV

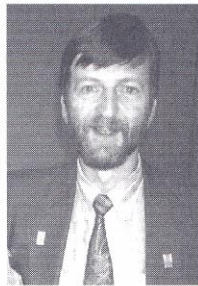
As disconcerting as these statistics may be, we know that TV is here to stay.

An increasing number of youths committing violent crimes seem to have trouble separating their actions from the behaviors they see on TV. Numbed by media to danger, they seem to be unaware, uncaring and lacking responsibility. As we have sewn, so are we reaping.

The differences with the pre-TV generation are astounding. My mom will not watch televised violence, and will neither witness nor discuss violence. My generation’s willingness to tolerate violence on TV betrays our short-sighted willingness to tolerate violence that doesn’t affect us today. Many youth today appear to fully accept violence as a part of everyday life. You get the gist of the trend.

**Media serving people.** Many community media centers are now incorporating media literacy into their training classes. In a shift of emphasis, some are incorporating their TV/media training into an overarching media literacy campaign. Centers are working

*See Helping Our Youth, page 19...*



*Alliance Photo*  
**Alan Bushong**

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**“Commercial television is used to deliver the audience to the marketer. The product is the audience.”**

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## Public Policy

# Alliance Members Work to Organize States

by Alan Bushong

When we think of outreach, we generally think of groups that have traditionally been misrepresented, underrepresented or totally ignored by the mass media—and we generally think of work at the local level. The 1996 Telecommunications Act and the pending entry of telephone companies into cable television services causes us to take a look at the state level.

The Public Policy Committee is now forming a network of State Coordinators to monitor state legislation and regulation, and to organize a support base among Alliance members, supporters and groups with similar cause. Committee member Sue Dicile Wedding is creating a handbook to help volunteers succeed as Coordinators. Fortunately, in several states Alliance members are already doing this work. Sue's opening to the guide provides insight on the need for the network and what the Alliance is working to accomplish.

**Quick Start Guide.** The objective of The Alliance for Community Media is to pass, by the year 2001, the Telecommunications Access Act, guaranteeing every person free or low-cost access to producing and receiving multi-media information over any public network which uses the public rights of way. In support of this objective the Alliance has, for the past several years, focused its limited resources on federal legislation and rule-making.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 is now shifting most telecommunications legislative and regulatory work to the state level. As local service and long distance telephone companies, cable companies, broadcasters and data services start to compete for each other's business, decisions affecting community media, access and funding will be made by state legislatures and Public Utility/Service Commissions (PUCs/PSCs).

This shift has dramatic implications for Alliance members and the work of our organization. Although we can't afford to place an office in every capital, we can no longer afford to be disorganized or silent at the state level. The regional structure of the Alliance is too widespread for state level coordination.

The Alliance is forming a network of state coordinators to monitor state level activity and organize members

for state level work. Members in some states have already organized to address state-level challenges. Their case studies are included in this handbook. Until new federal legislation re-establishes the rights of communities to gain adequate compensation for the use of public rights of way, state-level organizing will be key to the success of the Alliance and community media advocates.

No single state-level organizing model will work for all 50 states. The following guide is intended to provide State Coordinators with a flexible approach to implementing this critical role.

**The Role of the State Coordinator.** In a nutshell, the role of State Coordinators is to build, and be able to activate, an information and advocacy network in support of the Alliance's legislative and regulatory positions. There are four primary components to this role:

1. To monitor legislation and regulation.
2. To forward proposed legislation and regulatory actions to the Alliance national

office for evaluation.

3. To build a network of advocates at state level that can be leveraged in support of our legislative and regulatory goals.
4. To trigger the network into action as needed.

If you are in the Alliance for the long haul and want to help with this work, contact me (information below,) or incoming Public Policy Chair Rob Brading at 503-667-7636, ext.318; fax 503-667-7417; email at rbrading@mctv.org, or rbrading@orednet.org; or at MCTV, 26000 SE Stark, Gresham, Oregon 97030.

Like the YMCA and YWCA said about swimming, there is safety in numbers, and more fun, too!

Alliance Chair Alan Bushong is Executive Director of Capital Community Television in Salem, Oregon.

"...we can no longer afford to be disorganized or silent at the state level."

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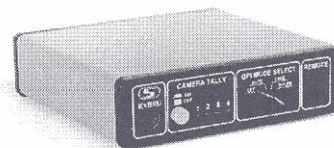
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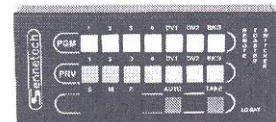
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# Youth & Media

In this issue of *Community Media Review* we celebrate youth and media. While we focus on the work at access centers in video, the scope broadens to encompass a variety of initiatives that use computers as a primary tool. While these youth projects don't share identical equipment, the philosophical ground is the same. All value the freedom of expression, foster young people to find their individual voices, and encourage their participation in community dialogue. All celebrate a questioning, curious mind and teach by doing. All act on the belief that through access to the means of communication we transform ourselves and our world.

We profiled the community we know best: Somerville, Massachusetts. Here, working parallel and collaboratively, the access center, non-profit computer access center, city agencies, and schools prepare the city's young people for the technological present and future.

We also glimpse how the media touches every part of life. Readyng youth for careers, **Downtown Community TV** has intensive video training, and at **Children's Express** they taste mainstream journalism. **Video Matchete** and **Manhattan Neighborhood Network's Youth Agenda** demonstrate that youth voices are a political force. The academic environment comes to life thanks to video from **Minneapolis Telecommunications Network**. Countering the cold and impersonal nature of technology, a telementoring program brings adults and youth together in a heart-centered way. **Gloria DeGaetano** reminds us that the

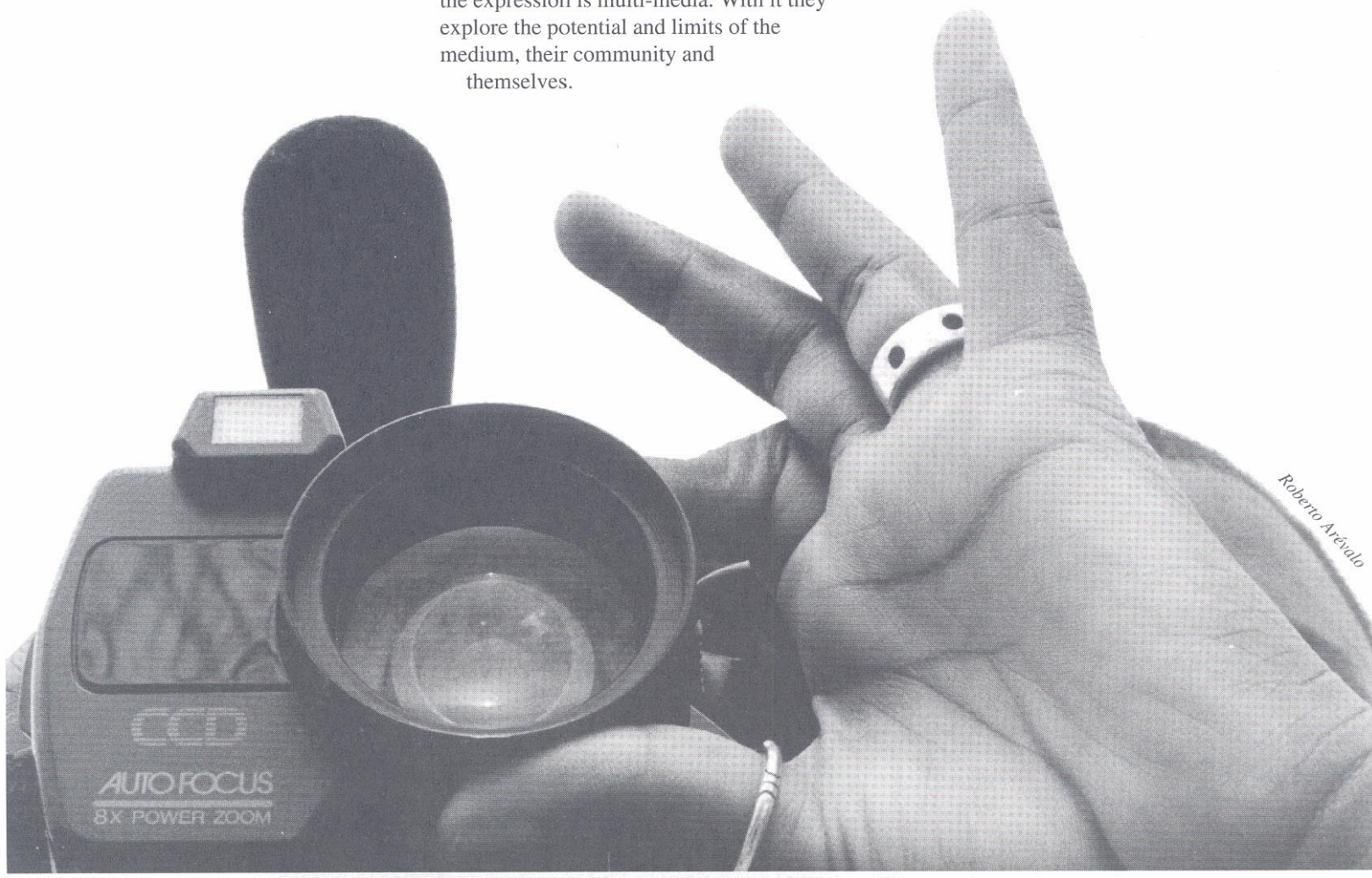
multimedia world is no replacement for real life as she educates us on the physical effects on children of passive television viewing.

Whatever tool is available, young people will embrace it for self-expression. With access to video equipment and computers, the expression is multi-media. With it they explore the potential and limits of the medium, their community and themselves.



Photo by Paula Cheney

*Editors Roberto Arévalo  
and Mimi Graney*



*Roberto Arévalo*



# The Mirror Project

## Walking Down The Streets

by **Roberto Arévalo**

I remember how happy I was as a teenager in Bogota, Colombia, getting my first paycheck from the factory where I assembled roller skates. As I grew older, I dreamt of having a desk in an office and wearing a tie. I felt that if I didn't have that, I was nobody. But later as I washed dishes in New York City, I embarked on developing my own curriculum for life. I began to look at myself and to pay attention to people around me. This is how I learned English, how I began to understand myself, and to communicate with the world around me. I shaped my own continuing education on my belief that life experiences are the essence of people's growth and should be shared.

In 1992, I joined the staff of **Somerville Community Access TV** and with this philosophy the **Mirror Project** began. I hit the streets of Somerville with an S-VHS camcorder in hand and began talking to teenagers. I talked to them about their lives, telling them that they could share how they saw the world with other people. I could show them how to use the camera, how to make videos. These videos, however, would be very different from what they saw on television. "These videos," I told them, "will be about real life, about your friends, about you." Many of them said "okay" and the first group of teenagers, four boys and four girls, came to the public access station to learn how to use the equipment. In the process I learned a few words of Creole, I got to practice my Spanish and my English, and I communicated with others in Portuguese.

As time went by and most teens who came to the classes were able to produce videos, including many that won festival prizes, we decided that bringing teens to SCAT was not enough. We wanted to reach deeper into communities that typically would not be able to come to SCAT, to the teens who had to babysit or lacked transportation or motivation. I began teaching classes at the housing developments. Being right there

in their neighborhood where they could be themselves, I stopped being a teacher and I became another student. I learned by talking to their parents and their neighbors and by simply being in the community. It is with this dialog that I further developed, with human development the goal, what I call "integral education."

Communication is not human experience packaged by the betacams from BBC, NBC, CBS or PBS to be consumed. Communication is not made of Hollywood stories. Not long ago

I turned on the television and flipped through the channels. I saw missiles on the news, a soap opera, a talk show and I saw President Clinton and Bob Dole but I did not see my friends. I did not see my mother. I did not see the party in my neighborhood although I did see that a teenager killed a woman close to where my friend lives. What we see on TV, read in the press and learn at school

can detach us from who we are, and encourages us to walk in the path of unconsciousness, where the only motivation is to be powerful, make money and please somebody else besides yourself.

At the **Mystic housing projects**, 15-year old **Roubbins**, a Mirror producer, is videotaping his 12-year-old friend **Michael**. Walking through the narrow hallway he talks about his grandmother, about his future. "I want to get a job so I can rent an apartment.

Then, I may become an artist be- cause I like drawing buildings and trees." He continues walking and parts the ocean of boys and girls playing football. Many of them jump in front of the camera  
*See Mirror Project, page 24...*

it's about you  
it's about me  
it's being yourself  
its the interaction between people  
it's about breaking barriers  
its about building bridges  
where  
thoughts move freely

*Roberto Arévalo*



*Photo by Jane Tiska*

*Linh Le receives instruction from Mirror Project  
Director Roberto Arévalo.*

### Our Journey

When we first came

we did not know  
what to expect.

But when we got to learn  
about each other's cultures  
we gained respect.  
Each of us had our own story  
And we brought  
it all under  
one territory.

*Louise Bernard  
Mirror Project Producer  
1992*





# An Imaginary House

## Computers and Video Together

### Art Online!

Building on the success of the **Imaginary House** project, media artist **Sarah Smiley** developed **Art Without Walls**'s next initiative, **The Internet Club**. The children involved in the Imaginary House had been very engaged in creating artwork on the computer; the Internet Club would therefore focus on creating images—using a scanner, a quick cam and paint programs—for an **Art Without Walls Web Site**. In addition, participants would be introduced to the internet and learn the basics of “netiquette”—most Club members do not have a computer at home or any internet access at school.

From a small room in the **Somerville Public Library**, the Internet Club members started exploring the world via the Web. They visited a variety of sites each session, developed some “pen pals,” and began to build their site. Each participant developed their own personal home page with a self-portrait. In addition to taking photos and drawing (both on paper and on computer), Sarah encouraged Club members to bring in things from home—a family photo, an image of a favorite place, a treasured object. These were then scanned and manipulated in Photoshop. The resulting collaged portraits revealed something about the sense of identity, special interests, and social or physical surroundings of each club member. Thus the club offers two complementary kinds of experiences; while surfing provides adventure in a virtual world, the home page project involves reflecting on one's self and community.

To check out the artwork firsthand, visit the site at <http://www.tiac.net/users/artwow/>. And please, send e-mail to the Club!

by David Publow

The younger group, ages six to nine. Aoife stands in front of the camera laughing as though she's

on a roller coaster. She's wrapped herself in a blue blanket to chromakey her body, so one can see only her little smiling head bobbing around.

Another giggling head appears; disembodied tiny heads on video. In the background is a scintillating splash of color, *The Cosmic Rug*. Asked what colors are in the rug, Aoife answers “all colors!”

and it's obvious that this rug is a big thing to her. It's a computer image, part of the room that she's created. Her friend Eric's room is the lair of the *Swamp King*, and Misieu's room is filled with neon ghosts caught forever in a three-second series of animated frames. This is their house.

These children created their house in the **Video Art Camp**. The camp was one part of the **Somerville Arts Council's Art Without Walls** project, and a demonstration of what teamwork can produce. It was a new way to bring computer and video interactions to the community.

“You have to break down boundaries, otherwise they'll freeze” said Video Camp coordinator **Sarah Smiley**. She was talking about getting the kids to open up in front of the camera, but this also applies to the cooperative efforts of Art Without Walls. The summer's success was the result of a Somerville network. The kids came

through the **Somerville Boy's and Girl's Club**, **Somerville Community Access Television** (SCAT) supplied a location, video equipment, and production help for the final shoot. The **Somerville Community Computer Center** (SCCC) loaned two **Amiga** computers to the Video Camp

for five weeks. **Hayyim Feldman** and **SCCC VISTA** volunteers tutored the kids on the Amiga throughout. The **Polaroid Foundation**, the **Somerville Arts Council**,

and a grant from the **Massachusetts Cultural Council** provided the funding.

Like many of the other parts of Art Without Walls, the Video Camp was meant to open up kids to diversity by teaching them about things they would never see in a classroom. The camp consisted of two groups, one for boys and girls ages six to nine, a second for ages ten to thirteen. The children were from many different ethnic backgrounds—Irish, Polish, Haitian—but all had a common goal: to create their own rooms, as

though they were creating a house. These could be indoors or out, gyms or dance floors, places furnished with whatever their imaginations concocted. Each group met once a week for five weeks.

During the first couple of weeks they developed stories, made drawings, and recorded

sounds. These provided materials to work with. In the next stage, they transferred their ideas to the Amiga using the **D-Paint** program. D-Paint's menu, with its palette of tools and colors, is a lot like graphics software on a **Macintosh** computer.

Most of the time the Amiga was fun. The difficulties came when kids were overwhelmed by the number of things they had to coordinate simultaneously to achieve an effect: tools, texture, colors, shapes. A lot depended on their level of interest. Sometimes the kids were into it, sometimes they felt stymied—largely because they couldn't completely control what they were doing. When they just let it fly, things generally worked out.

As the program continued, the staff

See Art, page 21...

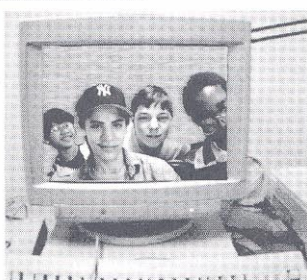


Photo courtesy Art Without Walls

Part of the gang at The Internet Club.

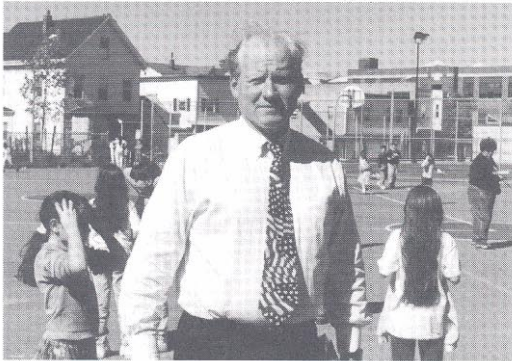


## Success in Education

# High Tech Classroom Connections

by J. Michael Pabian, Jr.

During the last six years, I have had the privilege of looking into the future while teaching young people about the past. I have seen my students engaged in meaningful, project-based learning modules which have been recognized for excellence at the local, state and national levels. I have witnessed a new motivation in these students, and I have gained a new enthusiasm for my subject and the way I teach it.



J. Michael Pabian: "I marveled as the students and I created curriculum together."

Telecommunications and *Cable in the Classroom* programming, sponsored by Time Warner, were instrumental parts of this surge. As I explore with my students, I am convinced that my students at the John F. Kennedy Elementary School are pioneers, proving that telecommunications has an effective and vital role to play in American education.

Television has offered my students enhanced opportunities for learning, and it has been a catalyst for developing their critical thinking skills. In 1990, after watching a replay of the Nixon-Kennedy presidential debate on A&E, they began to appreciate the power of television. As we studied the American Civil War and the Election of 1860, they began to wonder if a televised debate might have changed history. They went on to create that debate and videotaped their play. They then formed three editorial boards to react to student-created front pages from the *New York Tribune*, the *Richmond Gazette*, and the *Atlanta Constitution*. The efforts of my students helped me to win the A&E National Teacher Competition; the students received a TV, a VCR, and a computer for the classroom.

This success was invigorating for me and the students. I learned that I didn't have to do all the work, and that I could

invent a new type of schoolwork with my students. I became more of a coach than a teacher, and I marveled as the students and I created curriculum together.

Our journeys have taken us far beyond the walls of our classroom and the confines of our city. We used the Internet and cable television programming to develop a project entitled *Random Acts of Kindness: Exploring and Shaping the Community of the Future*. We found a program called KIDLINK on the Internet that put us in touch with 23,000 kids in over 60

foreign countries. Using the A&E program *Pole to Pole* as a guide, we explored the 30th parallel for examples of human beings helping one another. We received e-mail responses from all over, and used map pins to locate our new "keypals." The kids worked in groups to create books based on the stories that were exchanged. We used these letters to identify problems common to people everywhere, and the students used oral histories from their own families in which these problems were addressed to create plays. There was real learning going on during this project and the student-created books, plays and projects offered me tools for authentically assessing that

learning.

My students learn to work in back as well as in front of the camera. The Somerville community has shared in the success of my students in this new type of schoolwork as we produce and cablecast many of our projects on cable educational and public access television. For the last several years our students at the Kennedy School have participated in the **National History Day Competition**. Their media presentations, plays, papers and table-top projects have become a source of pride in the community as the students have won several state championships, and this past spring three students brought a national championship home to Somerville.

The more I think about it, the more I wonder if this type of learning is new. There was a time when thinking was considered an art, and problem-solving was an honored skill. If telecommunications can help us bring some interdisciplinary sanity to a one-size-fits-all, frag-

See *High Tech*, page 27...

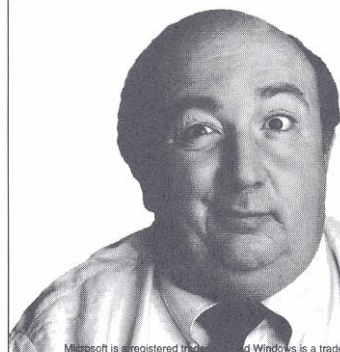
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# Alternative Youth Media

## The New Museum Presents

by **Brian Goldfarb**  
with **Mimi Graney**

No other generation has been more thoroughly schooled in media culture and the use of media

technology than today's youth. From high school students to the 20-something members of Generation X, U.S. youth are crucial players in emergent media cultures and subcultures through such forms as 'zines, hacking, access cable television, interactive multimedia and other alternative modes of communication.

**alt.youth.media**, an exhibit at the **New Museum** in New York City through September 1996, brought together more than 100 works by youth, primarily teens and young adults. The pieces ranged from institutionally sanctioned media texts of videographers to

more marginal productions of cyberpunks, riot grrrls, and 'zine editors. The title of the exhibition refers to the "alt" category of Internet news groups considered alternative to "mainstream" interests.

Thus, in this spirit, **alt.youth.media** highlights youth cultural perspectives and production methods either underrepresented or missing from conventional media.

**alt.youth.media** demonstrated that young people working these new media forms are not just creating isolated works of personal expression, but are forging a public space to collectively address "adult" issues such as family, sexuality, rape, domestic

abuse, and suicide.

Visitors encountered **Adrienne Salinger's** installation **Teenagers in Their Bedrooms**, a selection of eight large-scale color photographs. Covering their walls with a collage of logos and pictures of

music idols and sports heroes, teens patch together an identity from glossy magazines and other commercial print media. Nearby was **Conversation Piece**.

Based on a letter writing project between gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth from both **Unity House/The Safety Zone** in Troy, New York, and **BENT TV** at the **Hetrick Martin Institute** in New York City, this project deals with issues of coming out to parents and what it's like to be queer in rural New York—issues not readily addressed in the commercial media.

Web sites, videos, and multimedia CD-ROM projects were presented on eight video monitors, six computers and an audio center. Among what

was offered here: teenage life via digital raves, dream mazes, interactive games, and time capsules were presented in a CD-ROM by **Visionary Stampede**, a media organization working with San Francisco Bay schools and **gURL**, an electronic magazine or "e-zine" for girls on the Web.

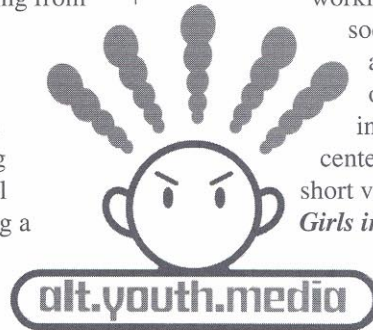
Videos were created by young people working with schools, social service agencies, and non-profit arts organizations including cable access centers. More than 40 short videos included *Some Girls in the Hood*, an animation about street violence from **Allegheny School**, an institution

for youth offenders, *Hatebox* from the **Minnesota Center for the Arts**, *Taming the Tube* from **Community TV** in Chicago, and *Alone Once Again* from the **Eagle Center Queer Video Workshop** in Los Angeles. The idea behind these initiatives is that television can be harnessed as a tool for consciousness-raising and activism, not only by teaching students to be critical media spectators, but also by allowing youth to express their views in their own television shows.

Whether working with a low-tech **Fisher-Price Pixelvision** video camera or a battery of computer equipment and software, these artists/producers reclaim public arenas dominated by the interests of major commercial enterprises and affirm their generation's most mundane and outlandish desires and experiences. As their work exposes the powerful aesthetic and political sensibilities of their media-rich generation, they powerfully challenge and reinvent mainstream media's images of youth and youth culture.

*Brian Goldfarb is the Curator of Education for the New Museum in New York City and coordinated the alt.youth.media exhibit. Mimi Graney is Executive Director of Somerville Community Access Television in Somerville, Massachusetts.*

"...digital  
raves, dream  
mazes,  
interactive  
games, and  
time  
capsules..."



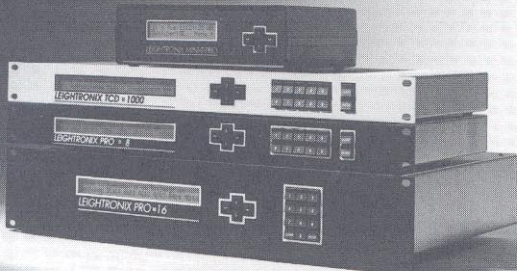
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# Manhattan Neighborhood Network

## Youth Agenda '96 Producers Focus on Presidential Race

by Victor Sanchez

**M**anhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN) recently spent the afternoon with the members of **Youth Agenda '96**, a group of young people who are producing a monthly series documenting the **1996 Presidential Election**. They focus on issues that are important to young people and will cover the candidates' positions on issues like abortion, gun control, and cutbacks in funding to education. In addition, they will interview young people and find out what they think about the candidates.

In the offices of **Global Action Project** on the sixth floor of a building in the Soho, Youth Agenda '96 meets three times a week to set up interviews, plan shoots on location or to log footage for an upcoming program. Varying in age from 15 to 17, the students come from Brooklyn and Washington Heights and from schools like the prestigious **Bronx High School of Science** to **Clara Barton High School**. Plans for their future range from becoming lawyers and community activists to working in human services and the media where they can "show positive images." MNN met with members **Anisah Miley, Courtney Nelson, Siva Persad** and **Antonio Rojas**.

**MNN:** What will viewers see on Youth Agenda '96?

**Anisah:** I would like to say that they would see an educational show, one that they could learn from, that when they turn off the TV they could say something about young people.

**Courtney:** Something that they can relate to. Our show is aimed at youth, so they can watch, find out what's going on and they can change something.

**Siva:** Something that's non-violent, not like the other shows that are aimed toward

young people.

**MNN:** How are young people represented on the television? When you turn on the TV, what choices of images of young people are you offered?

**Anisah:** Usually young people in the



Photo courtesy Manhattan Neighborhood Network

*Youth Agenda '96: Susan Siegel, Anisa Miley, Yvette Perez, Siva Persad, Isabel Gonzalez, Asia Darden, Melvina Douse, Diana Coryatt.*

media are shown in a negative way. They show us committing some crime, or pregnant. In the videos that we do, we show what's real. Me as an example: I'm not having sex, I'm not on the streets. I'm doing stuff that's positive and we show that in our videos. The reason you see the kind of images of young people on TV is that it sells.

**Courtney:** The kind of images of young people on TV make me want to educate myself more so I don't become what they show young people to be on TV.

**MNN:** Does TV do a good job teaching young people valuable skills for living?

**Siva:** No. These days what they show on TV is violence and using "role models" to get kids to buy things and act a certain way because they think this is the way young people are supposed to act and look.

**MNN:** As media makers with programs aimed at young people how come your programs don't have violence and "role

models" getting kids to buy things?

**Anisah:** I have goals and I know that's not what I want to do. I think I am strong enough to make those choices and take the right path.

**Siva:** For me it's this thing called conscience: it tells you to do the wrong things and the right things, and for me I know what's right and wrong.

**MNN:** Where do you see TV's conscience?

**Anisah:** It seems that everything is about money. Commercials sell things. It makes money for the TV. My conscience is about doing the right things. Trying to give what's true.

**Antonio:** TV conscience is about selling out.

**Siva:** As a producer, my message is to try to send out a positive message to the youth, instead of a negative message like the other shows.

**MNN:** When you watch TV how do you see yourself?

**Anisah:** When I am a viewer I'm like a shopper. But I'm a critical shopper, so I would be a critical TV watcher. I would ask myself, 'Is this the way it really is? Is this how it really happened? Do I know this to be the way it is? Or is this just crap?'

**MNN:** Now you make the media. Talk about being producers and not just consumers.

**Courtney:** For me, it's kind of easy. If you're going to change the way media portrays young people, when you get that chance, you should grab it. I was happy to come into this project and show what we think. We have a voice and people should hear it.

**MNN:** What's public access to you?

**Anisah:** It's freedom. It's just plain old freedom. It's cool to be able to express yourself.

**Siva:** I think it's great. People have the freedom to talk and discuss different topics and issues affecting them.

**MNN:** Your program focuses in on the election and how it will affect young people. In the coverage of the elections so

See *Youth Agenda*, page 23



# Computers, the Internet and Education

## Lost in Cyberspace

### Children's Express

**Children's Express (CE)**, which celebrated its twenty-first year in 1996, is a youth news service and leadership organization devoted to giving children a significant voice in the world. Through a distinctive method of oral journalism, reporters (ages 8-13) and editors (ages 14-18) share their peers' opinions and report on issues important to both youth and adults.

CE, an independent, non-profit organization, offers a monthly news service that provides copy to newspapers around the world. The young staff also works on various book projects and is routinely asked to speak before legislative bodies and other decision-making groups.

Teams from all five bureaus (Indianapolis, Marquette, MI, New York City, Oakland and Washington, D.C.) just completed their coverage of the **National Democratic and Republican conventions**, something CE has done since 1976. Young people from San Diego and Chicago were trained and assisted in the effort; the stories produced were picked up by the **New York Times** news service, CNN's "All Politics" site on the World Wide Web and ABC's "KidZine" Web site. Features by and about CE were published in several newspapers, including the **Washington Post** and the **San Francisco Examiner**. Reporters and editors for CE are not selected. Any interested young person in a bureau city needs only to attend a one-day training and have a willingness to work with others. Recruitment is done at schools, community centers and by word-of-mouth.

by Children's Express/New York Bureau

**M**ost people reading this story have probably used a computer, or have been on the Internet.

The average automatic teller machine is a computer, for instance.

Kids especially have been around computers a lot. They've learned to see computers as educational tools. But how are computers affecting education? Are they really helping kids?

To find out what to expect from the Internet and computers in the future, **Children's Express** talked to two technology experts: **Francine Shaw**, an associate professor at **New York University** and director of its program in **Educational Communication and Technology**; and **Steven Miller**, a former editor-in-chief of **LOTUS** magazine and author of the book **Civilizing Cyberspace**.

**CE:** Do you think people without computers get the same education as people with computers?

**Miller:** The important part about computers is that they allow kids to feel comfortable using a tool that's going to be needed in almost every job in the future. It's not that kids who don't have computers will learn less, but that it's going to make it harder for them to get jobs.

**CE:** How can computers help the way kids learn things in school?

**Shaw:** That depends on how they're used, just like anything else: the way you use a movie or video, a textbook or a field trip. If computers are designed to make you an active participant, where you really feel a sense of purpose in using the information you're looking for, they can help. If they simply put you in a passive role and show you things that excite you or freak you out like a movie or something sensational, then computers won't be any different than

that.

**CE:** What is "cyberspace"?

**Shaw:** Cyberspace is an imaginary space in which people connect with one another through computer networks. The space is mostly in our perceptions, but there are no boundaries to it. We have computer addresses where people can reach us. So they can sell things, tell us what they're thinking about, or they can distribute educational materials.

**Miller:** You can use it as a giant library. You can use it as a giant conversation place to talk to your friends.

**CE:** What are some of the goals of cyberspace and the Internet?

**Shaw:** The goal is different for different groups. For educators, the goal would be to make it possible to access educational materials that would extend what you already have in your schools.

**Miller:** We ought to have public space in cyberspace where schools and health care groups and community clubs can use it without spending enormous amounts of money. I think the government should do those things, but I have to confess I'm a little doubtful that under the current situation in Congress that's going to happen.

**CE:** How can the government have a role in what kids can access in cyberspace?

**Miller:** The right way is to give parents and teachers and kids the power to control what they have access to. You have filtering software that allows only certain types of addresses. Or you can subscribe to the section of **America Online**,

**Compuserve** or whatever server that is safe for kids. The wrong way is have the online service read every message and decide which ones go through and which ones don't. You're getting into censorship that way. But there are people who are in favor of it because they're so freaked out about their kids knowing more than them.

**CE:** What about the access kids have to "cyberporn"?

**Shaw:** Children have access to pornography everywhere. You can go into a newsstand and chances are nobody's going to stop you from looking at something. If a child had it in his or her head to look for

*See Children's Express, page 23...*



Photo courtesy Children's Express

*The mission of Children's Express is to give children a significant voice.*



## What is DCTV?

Since 1972 **Downtown Community Television (DCTV)** has taught people at the grass roots, particularly members of low-income and minority communities, to produce media that serves their communities and their own organizational uses. DCTV gives people the tools to produce insightful, artistic community television for the public. It represents community media access in the fullest sense: access to the means of communication; access to fresh, uncompromised reporting; access to training facilities and state-of-the-art equipment; access to new technologies that push the boundaries of television distribution and production.

Among DCTV's innovative programs for youth:

**Professional Television Training Program** (Pro-TV Program): The Pro-TV Program provides two years of professional-level intensive training to highly motivated high school students who are interested in pursuing a career in the media field. The students receive advanced training and hands-on experience in production and post-production as well as media theory and documentary history. Six graduates from last year's program have entered colleges as media majors.

**Summer Youth Employment Program:** DCTV provided 12 at-risk minority high school students with seven weeks of intensive professional broadcast training. Awarded competitively, the scholarship program serves as an entry point for continuing training that proceeds from our After-School Programs and onto professional internships.

**Program For Youth In Temporary Housing:** Through this project, DCTV offered intensive video training to 20 teenagers living in temporary housing. Each group produced their own "news magazine" video program, interviewing each other, family members and other shelter clients. The project culminated in a screening and cable broadcast. All participants in this program have the opportunity to continue their study within other DCTV workshops and to meet other young producers by participating in our other programs.

# PRO-TV Students Stand the Test

by Jamal Hodge

What's up!!! For five months I have been part of **PRO-TV** at **Downtown Community**

**Television.** While at this program I learned many things about the influential business of video. Joined by five other teens, we have learned editing, producing, lighting and sound.

I was able to grasp most of the knowledge, but I am still learning. I felt a bit distraught a lot of times, but no one said learning would be easy. Over the course of our five months in PRO-TV, my group and I learned about things we previously had not been exposed to, and traveled to a lot of places to gain and share knowledge.

Our most interesting trip was to travel to **Hostos College** for the **Computers for Social Change** conference. For months we were dreading the presentation we would make there.

We arrived and had an audience of 12 students. Our presentation began quite nicely. **Daniel Perez** and **Nikeeda Richardson** gave a short speech on how DCTV was created and of its importance. **Carol Leung** arose and explained pre-production, production and post-production to the audience that seemed to follow her every word and, when she was done, the sound of applause was heard. Nikeeda followed and discussed the methods and importance of directing and, although she was scared to death, she did quite fine.

Then, **Anthony Miller** went up and the crowd lashed out like hungry wolves. They bombarded him with questions on how to work the camera, and he answered every one. Next was Danny—and he panicked. The audience seemed the most interested in editing and asked questions we hadn't been taught yet! Just when we thought

Danny would never regain his voice, little Anthony, along with our teacher **Olubamidele O. Amenechi**, came to his rescue.

My turn was next and my task was the worst of all. I had to explain the importance and workings of sound in the camera. I flowed through the basics of sound and of its workings. All seemed well until I was talking about one of the microphones without mentioning its technical name. My teacher innocently stated this and the crowd saw a weakness and attacked.

They asked me every conceivable question on how the microphone worked and I froze. The answers were on the tip of my tongue but refused to be spoken. I just stood there looking like a six foot three inch fool.

When all seemed lost, Olu whispered the name of the mic to me and everything else came back. I answered every question and was rewarded with applause as I sat down. I felt like the man, and was eager to move on to the hands-on part of the workshop. This part went more smoothly. My group and I were relieved when our taxing students left the room, talking amongst themselves seemingly satisfied.

I think such experiences are good for us Pro TV students and I thank DCTV for exposing us to them.

Speaking out and presenting our work to the public is vital in our learning process because it teaches us how to communicate with complete strangers.

So far, what I have learned from DCTV is sure to help me gain a job and has given me insight on this powerful industry. With programs like this, teenagers like me both learn and have fun. If only school were like this!

*Jamal Hodge is a PRO-TV Student at Downtown Community Television in New York, New York.*

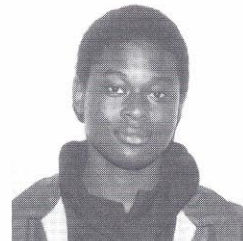


Photo courtesy DCTV

**Jamal Hodge**

**"If only school  
were like this!"**



# *Video Machete*

## Collective Video Production and Political Education

by Dalida Maria Benfield

This poem, written by our friend, neighbor, and fellow member of **Video Machete**, is the expression of the pain, anger and creative resistance of many youth in our community of Logan Square in Chicago. Video Machete was initiated by **Chris Bratton** and me in 1994 because of our own anger at growing incarceration rates, the propaganda that criminalizes youth of color, and the inadequacy of both social service and alternative arts programs to address the urgency of the situation.

Video Machete is a collective of community activists, video producers and students, all committed to working with gangs and their communities towards positive social change. Using life experiences as measures of social justice, group members produce videos exploring the complex issues facing young people. Situations from our own lives are documented or re-enacted and possible causes and solutions to problems are presented. This process provides the means for us to contemplate and analyze our social and political situation, developing the skills to participate as critically thinking members of society. Our completed videotapes, video installations and workshop presentations widen the dialogue to a broader community.

A springboard for positive cultural involvement and active social change, the Video Machete process of reflection and cultural production is a solution to the many problems young people face.

**Kathy Regalado**, a member of the collective writes:

*"Video is a means to express your own issues and concerns and to share them with other young people. Video allows you to document feelings and stories, or to artistically capture an image, or to be able to speak and have that voice that has always been there but hasn't had the chance to be heard."*

Video Machete uses video as a tool for social change. Currently, the core group of Video Machete is 15 members. The members of the group range in age from 15 to 37, and consist of high school students, college students, high school drop-outs, gang members and ex-gang members, low-wage workers, university professors, independent video producers, and artists. Several of our members have been incarcerated and are on intensive probation. 90% of the

group is Latino, 8% African-American, and 2% European-American. Our diversity is our strength. The group meets weekly for workshops in video production and theory, discussion and screenings, and ongoing production work. For the young people who are gang members, Video Machete provides one of the very few opportunities outside of the gang to reflect on the realities of their lives. Many social service agencies refuse to work with youth with gang affiliation. These youth are forced to either hide this aspect of their experience or forego needed services altogether.

Our work blurs mainstream culture's line between "bad" and "good" kids. Instead of the usual view of gang members exoticized as people of color who have left the "norm" of social life and entered deviant sub-cultures, we recognize gang culture as an integral part of "normal" Latino barrio culture in the United States. The gang is a form of economic and social support for young people and adults without access to the mainstream economy and culture. Established political powers, including most community leaders, criminalize gang members. This has the effect of drawing attention away from the larger social forces which, in fact, create gangs. Such things as the scarcity of jobs, the failure of public education, and the volatility of the cultural milieu are spirited away in the increasing calls for more police and harsher sentencing. Police harassment and mass incarceration are the consequences of this process which individualizes the problem.

Our videotapes question these "solutions" and ask what we can do to create new community-based answers. By respecting the choices, knowledge and integrity of each youth, Latino communities can discover alternatives to self-destructive violence.

Central to our process, in addition to regular Video Machete

meetings, all members of the group lead intensive video workshops at social service agencies and high schools. We have all become, concretely, both teachers and learners. We provide practical production skills, from researching and planning a project, to shooting and editing it and learning the vocabulary to analyze mainstream media forms and images—from TV and films to popular

music to new media such as CD-ROM. On a deeper level, we initiate a dialogue about the media and its role in shaping culture, coming to understand the media as a set of institutions, each with

**See Video Machete, page 27...**

Excerpt from *Nightmare*  
by **Ramiro Rodriguez**

Who am I?  
What am I?  
Was I born to die?  
Was I born with a gun in my hand,  
a needle up my arm?

Crying for hope, crying for  
salvation,  
Walking down a lonely path  
with lonely hurt  
only meant for me.



Video still courtesy Video Machete



# A Program for College-Bound Seniors

## Youth VOICES at MTN

by Paul Molina, with Pam Colby, JC Bagdadi, Herb Ellis, Frederick Blanch and Ryan Young

An easy way to get youth involved in community television is to recruit them in their natural habitat: school. The **Minneapolis Telecommunications Network**, the public access center in the City of Lakes, has seen several programs do this to successfully reach out and involve youth.

The **VOICES** program is a coproduction of MTN, **South High School**, and the **Humphrey Forum** (part of the **Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota**). **VOICES**, or *Values, Options, Issues, & Choices for Society*, is entering its seventh year of production. **VOICES** is an interdisciplinary program which teaches from a Social Science/Humanities perspective. Each year up to 55 top college-bound seniors start by receiving basic video training on camera and editing. Working in very small groups, the students create video projects to fulfill their **VOICES** class requirements. The program is extremely popular; there are usually about 200 applicants for the 55 slots in the program. To date the students from South High have created over 50 half hour programs.

**Music da camera**, which is produced in the Twin Cities though not at MTN, is a monthly half-hour program of chamber music distributed to 74 access systems in thirty states.

Music da camera was a winner in the **Alliance for Community Media's 1995**

**Hometown Video Festival** in the **Performing Arts** category (non-professional, single program). The program includes educational companion pieces to the television concerts, **Duetto Study Guides**, that are distributed to selected elementary and middle level schools in areas receiving Music da camera telecasts. These study plans, which are individually geared to each concert, are written by professional music educators to offer music teachers an opportunity to explore the connections of music to customs, history, geography, science, etc.

with their students. In order to help young people identify with the program, Music da camera also features talented young musicians on at least two concerts every year.

**Herb Ellis** is a sixth grade teacher at **Bethune Elementary School** in Minneapolis and an MTN producer:

*"If you would take a cross section of children, you would find that there is some form of television in their daily routine. Some get up with television. Some go to bed with television. Some even walk into the house in the afternoon and go straight to the television. There are even some that will work real fast finishing their chores around the house and then do their homework in a fast way in order to watch television. With this being the case, there is a built-in tool that can be used to educate our children. Since children spend an inordinate amount of time in front of the tube, why not take advantage of that fact and turn it into an educational experience?"*

Which, by producing a weekly newscast, is exactly what Herb and his sixth grade



Photo courtesy MTN

**Minneapolis Telecommunications Network is home to several programs reaching out to youth.**

*the classroom, affording the students of Bethune Elementary the opportunity to look at education as a fun thing."*

Before budget cutbacks, MTN

produced high school sports. These productions yielded a bumper crop of young volunteers. **Ryan Young** is an outstanding example of the caliber of access user MTN recruited through its sports programming.

Ryan first came in contact with

MTN and community television as a 19-year-old South High girls basketball assistant coach. While talking to MTN's sports producer at a game, he was invited to run a camera the following night at a basketball game at Minneapolis's **Henry High School**. "When I was running the camera, I felt the fire in me to move in front of the camera as an announcer," remembers Ryan. He soon found himself regularly announcing high school sporting events, and eventually moved into hosting a Sunday night sports talk show, the long-running **Metro Area Sports Wrap**.

Ryan also began taking classes at MTN and found himself working in all aspects of production. "I got really excited about television. I helped out in a lot of shows and began producing my own sports programming," he says.

Ryan and his crew of volunteers have produced, or helped produce, boxing matches, street festivals, coverage of the America/Japan week, and **St. Anthony Journal**, a talk show with **Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin**. In recognition of his outstanding work the **Minneapolis City Council** appointed Ryan to MTN's Board of Directors this year.

**Paul Molina** is Program Manager for the **Minneapolis Telecommunications Network**, Public Access TV for the City of Lakes.

**"When I was running the camera, I felt the fire in me to move in front of the camera..."**

class have done: "Students include anchors,

camera people, a floor director, an audio person, a computer-generated graphics person, a lighting person, a gaffer, gophers, public relations people, and whatever else is needed for them to put on a news program. The stories that are used are written by the students, researched by the students and, when necessary, rewritten by the students. A media that once gave trouble to our students has now been turned into a tool for education. MTN has become an integral and essential extension of



# What Access Means to Me

## A Young Producer in Access

by Brian L'Heureux

**A**ccess television. Its name implies that anyone of any age can be involved, even a 15-year-old. Being involved in access at this age is not only fun, but provides helpful experience for the future. Whether you intend to make it a career or just a summer job, or want to do something completely different, being involved can give you a reputation for any type of job. People are impressed when they hear you can produce television shows.

I became involved in television production when I was about 11 years old, through the **KidVid** class offered at **Shrewsbury Public Access Connection** (SPAC). After taking that course, the middle school video teacher, **Mr. John McDonald**, asked if I would like to help with school shoots, and

I learned a great deal while working with him. After my middle school years, I got involved with SPAC again and took their free adult and advanced courses. After I finished the courses, the calls for help with

crew started to come in and I began assisting on all sorts of projects. Still a beginning video producer, my friends and I decided to start our own series called **Video Break**.

The shooting of the first show was interesting, to say the least. None of us had really produced or hosted our own show before, and unfortunately it showed. One rather prominent example of this was timing. We

hadn't prepared enough material for a half-hour show, so when the material ran out, the hosts signed off. They had no idea how much time was left—15 minutes! We had to come back up from black and the last half of the show was a constant plea for people to write in with ideas. Needless

to say, that never happened again. Now we've got it down to a science: no more late roll-ins, no more running out of material. Now, in fact, sometimes we almost run out of time! For our group of teenage producers the hardest part of producing a series is scheduling the actual shoot. Between school, sports, music, homework, and other meetings, it can be almost impossible to synchronize everyone's schedules for a few hours.

Although I am a teenager, not all

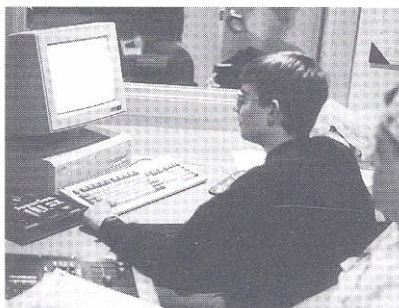
**B**rian's most recent major production was a highly successful program funded by **Advise**, a local family violence prevention group. A dramatic re-enactment of police response to a domestic violence call gave three different perspectives of the unfolding incident. Some audience members were positioned at the home of the fictional family, some stayed with the police and went in the squad car to answer the 911 call, and some saw both perspectives on videotape in the studio. The conflicting impressions of the situation and debate on the appropriateness of officer actions educated the community on these complex issues. Brian also edits an **Amiga** and **Macintosh** users' newsletter called **Access Graphics** that is expanding to a national audience through the **Alliance for Community Media** listserv. He can be contacted at [lheureux@telegram.infi.net](mailto:lheureux@telegram.infi.net).

the shows I produce are directed toward teens. I produce three other shows: **To Protect and Serve**, a show about local police issues; **SmartMoves Aerobics**; and **Money Matters**.

An access television station is much different from school because it is a taste of the real world with adults. For instance, when a homework assignment is not done, your grade is lowered, and all it affects is your grade. When you are the producer of a series, the responsibility is much greater. When you fail to meet a deadline, instead of affecting your grade, it shows to the many people watching the program on television. School is training, and television is training in action, deadlines and all.

Access television is a tremendous opportunity to earn experience and knowledge—and to have fun. I am very grateful for the opportunity to produce shows and use the technology provided at the state-of-the-art facilities in Shrewsbury. Although school has to come first, I still make television production a significant part of my life and hope to make it my career.

*Brian L'Heureux is a volunteer producer with Shrewsbury Public Access Connection in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts.*

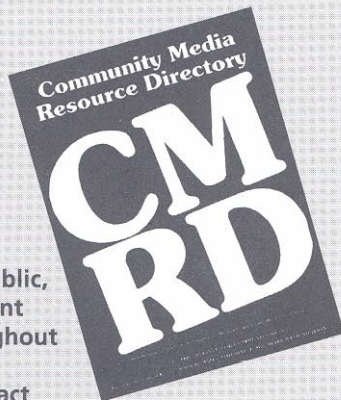


Photos courtesy SPAC

*"An access television station is much different from school because it is a taste of the real world with adults."*

### The most detailed compilation of access organizations in the United States!

## Community Media Resource Directory



- ◆ Almost 1,000 listings of public, educational, and government access organizations throughout America and the world
- ◆ Arranged by state with contact name, address, phone, fax, e-mail.
- ◆ Includes organization types, budget size, hours of original programming, area population, number of subscribers, and more!

Alliance Members: ☐ \$40      Non-members: ☐ \$60

Mail payment to the Alliance for Community Media  
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Washington, DC 20001-4542

Funding provided by the  
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation



# Early Childhood Development

## TV and the Growing Brain

by Gloria DeGaetano

TV watching has become America's favorite pastime. It's what most of us do most of the time—it's what our children do more often than anything else. Whether providing background noise or main stage amusement, 70 percent of American families watch it while they eat dinner. Family activities like playing cards or board games or just plain old conversation have, basically, "gone down the tube."

When parents overuse TV and video, they don't think much about limiting their children's access to it. Consequently we see babies as young as six months being propped in front of the screen; two-year-olds who watch their favorite movies over and over AND OVER again without *any* adult interaction (recently a teacher proudly told me that her 18-month-old daughter watched *Aladdin* at least 50 times!); preschoolers who daily watch children's fare and their parents' favorite soaps and cop shows. And no one talks to them about what they are watching.

By kindergarten, kids will have spent at least 5,000 hours watching TV—the time it takes an adult to earn a college degree! By the ripe age of six, most American

kids have acquired the video habit so that the next twelve years they will get their "fix" three to five hours daily. *And no one will talk to them about what they are watching!*

Is this any way to raise children? Isolating them in front of screens not only paves the way for a life of "couch potatodom," but also adversely affects their physical, cognitive, and emotional development. In this article I will explain how screen overuse can alter children's brain development and call attention to the urgent need for family media literacy, the need to limit children's TV viewing time, and to talk with them when they do watch.

**3 Brains in 1.** The human brain consists of three distinct parts acting independently of each other *and* interacting with each other simultaneously. The core brain, sometimes referred to as "the

reptilian system," controls instinctual responses, physical coordination, and self-preservation; the limbic system or "middle brain" controls feelings, daydreams, intuitions; and the cerebral cortex or "higher brain" controls our ability to think, to synthesize and create, to make decisions, and to experience self-understanding.

All three areas grow rapidly in early childhood. The baby, as she learns to crawl and walk, starts development at the core brain level where the sensory-motor system is controlled. In a few years, strong feelings become evident, as any parent of a two-year-old can tell you, when the limbic system "kicks in." Between the ages of

two to five, the child's cerebral cortex undergoes bursts of growth as language centers develop and the seeds of higher level thinking are sown.

Despite a flurry of activity in early childhood, the brain grows slowly and steadily throughout middle childhood and adolescence. During all that time, Mother Nature demands certain

prerequisites if the brain is to successfully reach its adult capacity.

In families where overuse and misuse of video have become habitual, the child's brain is hard-pressed to grow appropriately. The necessary prerequisites cannot be met without limiting children's access to the screen and without engaging children in the viewing process itself. Although there are several prerequisites, I've chosen the three most important ones to examine here.

**1. Brains need bodies that move.** In 1988 the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a report which revealed that up to 50 percent of school-age children were

not getting enough exercise to develop healthy hearts and lungs, and that 40 percent of youngsters five to eight years old exhibit one risk factor for heart

disease. Since that time the Academy has strongly encouraged parents to take more control of the TV set because overuse of the screen frequently means underuse of young cardiovascular systems.

In addition to the obvious health benefits, physical activity in childhood builds the motor control centers in the "reptilian"

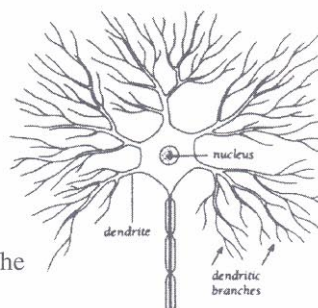
brain, ensuring proper large and small muscle coordination and developing a mature sensory-motor system. This system is critical for accurately perceiving and processing input from the physical world. When little ones spend more time in front of a screen than they spend interacting with the environment around them in creative play, for instance, they cannot possibly get enough movement experiences for adequate development of their sensory and motor circuitry. Some of the consequences can be quite profound. For example, 30 percent of the optic nerve, the single biggest nerve in the human body, is connected to the spinal column. This fact

has led many experts to believe that movement plays a critical role in the development not only of the nerve, but also our eyesight, and later our abilities to read and to write as well.

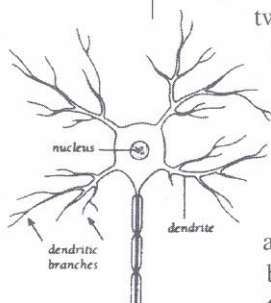
Besides strenuous physical activity, involvement in the 3-D physical world through lots of tactile experiences, such as sand and water play, art projects,

block building, cooking, crafts, and hobbies also contributes to a healthy adult sensory-motor system. Kids with a TV habit are losing opportunities for sensory-rich experiences, since images on a screen, no matter how salient and colorful, cannot foster nervous system capacities. These

**See *Growing Brains*, page 25...**



Healthy neuron with many dendrites.



Neuron with few dendrites.

**Overuse of video in a child's life can negatively impact the rate and quality of brain development.**



# Telementoring

## A New Type of On-Line Relationship

by Dorothy Bennett, Naomi Hupert, Terri Meade, and Kallen Tsikalas with Jebeze Alexander

As more and more schools connect to the "information superhighway," a question repeatedly asked

by those with a stake in education is "how can students benefit from being on-line?"

One benefit is undoubtedly the new option for communicating via the Internet—electronic mail (e-mail).

*Telementoring* (on-line mentoring via e-mail), has proliferated in the form of collaborative projects and special programs across the country, and has the potential to provide resources for both students and educators.

**EDC's Center for Children and**

**Technology (CCT)** is presently investigating the benefits of telementoring through the **Telementoring Young Women in Science, Engineering, and Computing project**. Telementoring uses the strengths of telecommunications to provide support for young women in high school pursuing studies in science, engineering, and computing. From the outset, telementoring has developed from the premise that merely getting people on-line is not enough; to fully utilize the strengths of on-line communication, attention and care have to be paid to building and maintaining a sense of community on-line.

CCT's telementoring project builds on the traditional concept of mentoring: a supportive relationship, sustained over a period of time, between a younger person and an older person. Communication between mentor and protégé, however, takes place entirely on-line via electronic mail.

In either case, each participant needs access to a computer, a modem, a tele-

phone line, e-mail software, and a connection to the Internet. This allows a project to draw on a larger pool of potential mentors from across the country so that, for example, an engineer in Washington, DC can correspond with a student in

Colorado. In addition, access can be established relatively cheaply depending on how participants are connected. Perhaps the most enticing advantage of on-line communication is that it allows both senders and receivers of messages to choose at their convenience when to communicate. The Internet offers a range of proven and reliable options for on-line communication. Messages can be sent privately to an individual, distributed to a list of individuals (via electronic mailing lists), or posted to a "bulletin board" or newsgroup for public viewing. Central to telementoring is the

understanding that in order to foster effective conversation it is important to complement these on-line structures with supports that help build on-line communities where reflective conversation can take place and meaningful relationships can grow.

With funding from the **National Science Foundation**, CCT has been engaged in a three-year experimental project to develop Internet-based telementoring environments that link young women in high school with practicing professionals for ongoing guidance and support. In its first year, telementoring focused on providing support for young women enrolled in a junior-year mechanical engineering course in a New York City public high school. Building on this work, the project is currently collaborating with the **Department of Energy's Adventures in Supercomputing (AiS)** program to pilot the program nationally in ten AiS school sites. The AiS program has provided high

schools serving a range of ethnically and economically diverse students with computers and telecommunications technologies to capture and cultivate the interests of these students, particularly young women, in science, mathematics, and computing. In its third year, telementoring will be introduced as a component of all AiS school sites, having a potential impact on a large number of female students in 70 schools.

Since 1988, CCT has carried out a number of investigations into the relationship between gender and technology that shed light on the needs of young women who are working in or considering careers in engineering or computing. These studies revealed the many tensions and conflicts that young women experience when contemplating or pursuing technical and scientific courses and careers. CCT's most recent research with young women in pre-engineering classes at the high school level revealed the prominence of their feelings of isolation in these classes. There was no one to validate the difficulties they were experiencing and there were no female mentors to share similar experiences and help them craft strategies for dealing with these conflicts.

In light of this research, telementoring was created to provide supportive environments in which young women in high school can safely discuss their school experiences and feelings with practicing women professionals who have "made it" in science and technical fields. In turn, these professionals can be constructive in addressing many of their apprehensions, tensions, and conflicts, and help sustain their interest in science and technology by providing expert knowledge, useful strategies for overcoming fears and obstacles, and sound career advice.

Mentoring programs specifically designed for young women are currently available in a wide variety of forms. While many of these programs have succeeded in raising career awareness, few have provided widespread opportunities for young women to receive sustained support for dealing with the more conflict-laden,

**See *Telementoring*, page 22...**

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**"...telementoring was created to provide supportive environments in which young women in high school can safely discuss their school experiences and feelings with practicing women professionals who have 'made it'..."**

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# Helping Our Youth

Continued from page 4

with schools to incorporate media literacy into standard curricula, and to prepare educators for such classroom teaching.

**Public discourse and civic participation.** The potential benefit to our communities is endless. We have the opportunity to put public discourse and civic participation back into community life. Too often, media has created division and confrontation as a means to attract mass audience.

We can do better. In a society in which just 38.2% of registered voters participated in the 1994 elections, we can use media to start the conversation, to initiate action, to provide information, to bring people together and to find common ground.

In a society rife with discontent and criticism, we rarely see the promotion of the very institutions which are the building blocks for our youth and our future. How often do we hear:

- government is "we the people"; we can build great government at all levels

- schools are good; let's fund them to be great
- non-profit organizations improve our communities on a daily basis.

We in community media serve each of these vital parts of our communities.

I want my daughter

to have media that builds participa-

tion in civic

life. Only now

can I see how

profoundly that I,

as a kid growing up

just outside an all-white farm

town of 680, was emotionally moved and

influenced by media coverage of civil

rights, women's rights and anti-war

movements, and by public service an-

nouncements of the 1960's.

Only on our local community media channel have I found such material. To me, the most moving is a short fill program about volunteering. Two items stand out.

The voice background includes

**"We owe our young people something better than the media that is shaping their lives."**

President Kennedy's famous "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

Fortunately, the President's audio is extended to include "Ask not what

America will do for you, but what

together we can do for the freedom of man."

Two text titles inserted between shots of volunteers then state, "We make a living by what we

get...but we make a life by

what we give."

I can think of no more powerful thoughts to provide to our youth.

We owe our young people something better than the media that is shaping their lives. And as Alliance members, we are putting our talk into action.

*Alan Bushong is Chair of the Alliance for Community Media.*

## An Invitation to Join the

# Alliance for Communications Democracy

6...increasing awareness of Community Television through educational programs and participation in court cases involving franchise enforcement and constitutional questions about access television.

**Become an Alliance Subscriber for \$350/year** and receive detailed reports on current court cases threatening access, pertinent historical case citations, and other Alliance activities.

- Voting membership open to non-profit access operations for an annual contribution of \$3,000.
- Non-voting memberships available to organizations and individuals at the following levels:
  - Alliance Associate, \$2500 - copies of all briefs and reports.
  - Alliance Supporter, \$500 - copies of all reports and enclosures.
  - Alliance Subscriber, \$350 - copies of all reports.

Direct membership inquiries to Rob Brading, Multnomah Community Television, 26000 SE Stark St., Gresham, OR 97038, or phone 503/667-7636.

**Voting Members:** Chicago Access Corporation, Illinois • Montgomery Community Television, Inc., Maryland • Staten Island Television, New York • Boston Community Access & Programming Foundation, Inc., Massachusetts • GRTV, Grand Rapids, Michigan • Tuscon Community Cable Corporation, Arizona • Ōlelo: The Corporation for Community TV, Hawaii • Multnomah Community TV, Oregon • Manhattan Neighborhood Network, New York • Cable Access St. Paul, Minnesota.

**Non-voting Members:** City of Iowa City, Iowa • North Suburban Access Corp., Minnesota • Oakland County Cable Corporation, Michigan • Ann Arbor Community Access Television, Michigan • Columbus Community Cable Access, Inc., Ohio • Capital Community TV, Oregon • Cincinnati Community Video, Ohio • Alliance for Community Media, Central States Region • Alliance for Community Media, Far West Region • George Stoney, New York University, NY • Bronx Community Cable Programming, Inc., NY.



# Youth & Media Resources Around the Country

**Alliance for Community Media**  
666 11th St. NW, Suite 806  
Washington, DC 20001-4542  
202-393-2650  
Contact: Kelly Matthews, Director of Member Services. The Alliance supports an Educational Special Interest Group (SIG) coordinated by Lucy Griggs of Tampa Educational Cable Consortium. The Alliance also offers many publications: *1996 Hometown Video Festival Program Catalog* with contact information for all 67 program entries in the Youth category; *Educational SIG 1996 Resource Guide*; and the *Community Media Resource Directory*. The Alliance annual conference will also feature three full tracks of workshops for Educational Access, Trainers, and Internetworking (July 9-12, 1997 at the Milwaukee Hilton).

**Art Without Walls**  
Somerville Arts Council  
55 Evergreen Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02145  
617-625-6600  
Director: Cecily Miller. **Art Without Walls** is a collaborative project bringing art, artists, youth and community organizations together. **The Internet Club** based at the **Somerville Public Library** and the **Imaginary House**, with **Somerville Community Access Television** and the **Somerville Community Computing Center** are two technology based efforts.

**B.N. Explorer**  
526 Inverrary Lane  
Deerfield, IL 60015  
847-537-6802  
Contact: Gary Mann. Each year eight groups of 12-15 young people each produce one show of **B.N. Explorer**. Host/explorers learn about interesting people and places from all over the world and share it with a TV audience.

**Cable in the Classroom**  
**Turner Educational Services Inc.**  
105 Terry Drive, Suite 120  
Newtown, PA 18940-3425  
800-344-6219  
A quarterly magazine details video programming and multi-media resources available to educators such as **CNN Newsroom** and electronic field trips.

**Camera-8**  
P.O. Box 803  
Mountain Home, ID 83647  
208-587-8801  
Contact: Tom Hacker. The junior high school video club uses public access equipment to make programs about their school including **Junior High Happenings** and their Hometown finalist program, **How to Make a Home Video: The Making of Star Gack**.

**Children's Express**  
1440 New York Avenue NW, Suite 510  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-737-7377  
website: www.ce.org  
A non-profit youth news service and leadership organization devoted to giving children a significant voice in the world.

**Community Technology Centers Network (CTCNet)**  
**EDC**  
55 Chapel Street  
Newton, MA 02158  
969-7100  
Contact: Steve Ronan, Peter Miller. National network of computer and cable access centers. **CTCNet** maintains a list serve for youth-oriented projects.

**DATV**  
4861 Leafburrow Dr.  
Dayton, OH 45424  
513-236-7661  
Contact: Karen Harker. At **DATV**, the magazine format **USA Kids Today** is produced. For students from first to eighth grade, the center conducts journalism classes.

**Davis Community Television**  
1075 Olive Drive #8  
Davis, CA 95616  
916-635-8460  
Contact: jesikah maria ross. Among their numerous youth programs, **HIV/AIDS Awareness & Prevention Week Video Chronicle** is a documentary on how twenty eighth grade students worked collectively to make a difference by creating and implementing a week long educational event covering the causes, prevention, and treatment of HIV/AIDS. The video chronicles their process, passion, educational efforts and results.

**DCTV**  
1400 20th Street NW Suite G2  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-659-6260  
Contact: Martha M. Sipple. The single program **Out of Time** was a Hometown finalist.

**Diamante Productions**  
612 East 14th Street #12F  
New York, NY 10009  
Contact: Fernando Alimestica. The series **Diamante** was a finalist at Hometown in the *Programming By Youth For Youth* category

**Downtown Community Television**  
87 Lafayette  
New York, NY 10013  
212-966-4510  
Contact: Hye Jung Park. The **Pro-TV** program is a two-year apprenticeship for high school students pursuing a media career. The also have two programs for disadvantaged young people, a seven-week summer scholarship program and training for youth in temporary housing.

**Gloria DeGaetano**  
P.O. Box 311  
Redmond, WA 98053  
206-881-6130  
Gloria's books include **Television and the Lives of our Children: A Manual for Teachers and Parents** and **Screen Smarts: A Family Guide to Media Literacy**.

**East Bay Center for the Performing Arts**  
339 11th Street  
Richmond, CA 94801  
510-234-5624  
Contact: Sam Ball. Highlighted by **CNN** and **NPR**, the video **Neighborhood Dilemmas** lets students tell how they would like their community to look and possible ways to affect such change.

**Germantown Community Television**  
7653 Old Poplar Pike  
Germantown, TN 38138  
901-754-4788  
Coordinator: E. Frank Bluestein. **Germantown High School** students manage, run and operate the PEG access center. Their daily morning news show, **Wake Up Germantown**, includes community and school news, sports and weather.

**Ithaca High School**  
1401 N. Cayuga St.  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
607-387-6977  
Contact: Jeff Spence. **Lake Street News** is a bi-weekly program produced by students enrolled in the interdisciplinary course "English/Media Production" for which they receive a required English credit plus a credit in technology. Twenty students produced news features, documentaries and "psychotic creations" with public access equipment.

**Libraries for the Future**  
521 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1612  
New York, NY 10175  
212-682-7446  
Contact: Cynthia Lopez. National advocacy organization for libraries.

**MTN**  
125 S.E. Main Street  
Minneapolis, WI 55414  
612-331-8575  
Contact: Pam Colby, Paul Molina. Through an interdisciplinary program from a social studies/humanities perspective, the seven year old **VOICES** Program works with college-bound high school seniors.

**Music da camera**  
3965 Bayside Road, Long Lake, MN 55356  
612-475-1775.  
Producer: Frederick Blanch. To selected elementary and middle level schools in areas receiving **Music da camera** telecasts, printed educational companion "Duetto Study Guides" geared to each concert are distributed to offer music teachers an opportunity to explore the connections of music to customs, history, geography, science, etc. with their students. The program was winner of the 1995 **Hometown Video Festival's Best Performing Arts** award.

**New England Cablevision Of Massachusetts**  
38 Blackburn Center  
Gloucester MA 01930  
508-281-2443  
Contact: Sinikka Nogelo. **Teens Talk Truth Through Today's Television** was a finalist at the 1996 **Hometown Awards in For Youth, By Youth Programming**.

See *Youth*, next page...



# Art Without Walls

## Continued from page 8

learned as much about the kids as the kids learned about computers and video. The younger group created spontaneously and left yesterday's thoughts behind.

The older kids developed ideas and stuck with them. The younger kids paid more attention to their stories. The older group concentrated on the actual images, once they got past the peer pressure, and put more time into them. Both groups didn't know quite what to do with their finished Amiga drawing until Sarah, Lemmy, and Hayyim introduced them to animation. "This brought it to life for them," said Hayyim.

On the last day, the staff teamed up with SCAT producer **Jeff Maroun** to help each participant put together a video on top of the animated backgrounds. Each kid stood in front of the camera for a few minutes, doing whatever came to mind while his or her animated room played on the screen behind, then taped a couple of minutes of interview. To ease the tension of being alone in front of the camera, the kids talked about the rooms they had created, or responded to questions from a partner in the control room. By switching roles as they went along, from the studio to the control room, everybody got a chance to see how things worked. All were fairly comfortable on camera. Some moved around a lot, some dressed in costumes. Some were a little reticent when they were being interviewed. Some of the kids with family problems seemed to let it all go for awhile and shine in front of the camera.

**The older group, ages ten to thirteen.** Julianne shrinks as she grooves to the rap music inside her *Club DEEP*. "Everyone can come," she says, "and dance, and have a good time." Above her spins a gleaming disco ball. In one corner a big blue radio bounces against the hot pink checkerboard background. Her friend **Robert's** room is filled with zombies. His eyes have been blued out so his eye sockets mirror the surreal paint-blob background. His body floats around the screen like a wraith.

In her room, **Sophise** has donned a glittering black shawl and head wrap; she looks like a jazz diva. She's curious about how things work—mixers, microphones,

hook-ups—and Jeff teaches her about them all. Hayyim asks about her space. "My room's got frogs all over it." The frogs eat everybody except her. Her background is an exploding

criss-crossed pattern—like a fabric—of green, yellow, and blue pastel colors. The camera pulls her image forward and backward in sync with the

kaleidoscopic color.

Sarah Smiley's instruction encouraged everyone to learn things in their own way. Conformity was not required. It got the children to talk to each other. The camp also gave the kids video and computer skills, and an expanded sense of how videos, cartoons, and TV programs are constructed. Use of the Amiga, for example, eliminated the idea that you have to have a camcorder to do anything on video.

The final product was a giant wooden house, painted brightly and whimsically by the kids. Monitors placed in each of its windows revealed the imaginary rooms inside. The house was brought to the local shopping mall and was prominent in the annual Somerville Arts Council street festival, **Art Beat**. For those who couldn't see the house in person, a compilation of the

videos was cablecast on the access channel and each camp member received a copy of the video to keep.

This new way of looking at community television is "what this is all about" said Hayyim. "And how will they think about their favorite TV programs differently? It might give them a window to see how they could participate. And then maybe they could make the leap to what don't they see on TV that they would like to see."

*David Publow is a member of Somerville Community Access Television.*

"...how will they think about their favorite TV programs differently? It might give them a window..."

## Youth & Media Contacts

### Continued from prev. page The New Museum of Contemporary Art

583 Broadway  
New York, NY 10012  
212-219-1222  
Contact: Katie Clifford. Exhibited 'zines, web sites, CD-ROMs, audio, print and video projects by youth artists called "alt.youth.media" in September, 1996.

### Sarah Smiley Malden Community Access Television

1245 Pleasant Street  
Malden, MA 02148  
617-321-6400  
matv@world.std.com  
A video artist, Sarah has coordinated numerous youth oriented youth projects using video and computers including the **Art Without Walls Internet Club** and **Imaginary House**. With CTCNet (Community Technology Centers Network) she coordinates the youth issues list serve.

### Somerville Community Access TV

90 Union Square  
Somerville, MA 02143  
617-628-8826  
Executive Director: Mimi Graney.  
Project Director: Roberto Arévalo.  
**SCAT's Mirror Project** was selected by the **National Association of Local Arts Agencies** as one of the most successful programs for at-risk youth in the nation. With intensive technical training, close contact with the families, and group and one-on-one work, Somerville youth reflect

their own lives through video. The two-year project, **Action Teens Against Drugs** brought together middle school students to learn about drug prevention and video production to create their own peer education programs.

### Somerville Community Computing Center

167 Holland Street  
Somerville, MA 02144  
617-629-2933  
Director: Kate Snow. During **MacMondays**, elementary school students develop their own newsletter. A collaboration with the **Powderhouse Community School** brings teachers and students to the center for hands on computer skill building. In the **Youth Web Project**, teenagers create sites for local non-profits.

### Shewsbury Public Access Connection

57 Parker Road  
Shrewsbury, MA 01545  
508-757-3006  
Executive Director: Stan Poreda.  
**Kid Vid** is their ongoing youth training program.

### Video Matchete

2706 N. Francisco St.  
Chicago, IL 60647  
312-862-4932  
Contact: Dalida Maria Benfield.  
**Video Machete** is a collective of activists, producers and students using video in their work with gangs and their communities towards enacting positive social change.



# Telementoring

## Continued from page 18

psycho-social, and emotional issues that arise when they pursue courses in traditionally male-dominated fields. Because young women do not have easy access to professionals, telecommunications is a particularly appropriate medium in which to provide this kind of support.

Support can take many forms.

The project has developed and tested a

number of on-line communication formats

intended to support

different "clusters" of partici-

pants—students, telementors, teachers, and parents.

**One-on-One Mentoring.** One-on-one mentoring relationships are at the heart of telementoring. Individual students are matched with individual mentors who have varying amounts of experience in technical and/or scientific fields, including practicing professionals as well as college students in fields ranging from neural computational science to geology and bio-engineering. Information obtained from mentor applications and student surveys is used to match mentors and students. Before private discussions begin, mentors and students participate in separate on-line sessions to prepare for establishing these relationships. Mentors and students, for example, are asked to craft introductory biographies and to set goals for their relationships.

Students generally communicate regularly with their mentors about once or twice a week.

**Discussion Forums.** All participating students and mentors are enrolled in mailing lists allowing for group discussions. Mentors are recruited to facilitate dialogue around topics identified as important to students and based on mentor-articulated interests and talents. During each forum, the facilitator prepares, hosts, and moderates a "talk" on the designated topic. Each talk is a mini-seminar that all students can participate in and, when possible, is presented in the form of a scenario. Past topics have included *What is College Really Like: An Insider's Look*, *A Day in the Life of a*

*Visiting Scientist*, *Affirmative Action and You*, and *Blending Science and the Arts*. Discussion forums enable young women to gain a broader perspective on the difficulties encountered and the different strategies used by women in technical work environments.

**Peer Lounges.** In addition, private mailing lists, called "lounges," are set

up for each cluster of

participants

involved with

the project, i.e.

students,

mentors, and

project liaisons. A

critical vehicle for building a

sense of community among participants, the lounges provide informal and formal opportunities to learn from colleagues and to share different strategies for approaching difficult issues. Discussions in the lounges often revolve around such issues as balancing family and work, self-image and self-confidence, networking and professional contacts, career opportunities and options, and strategies for dealing with classroom issues.

**Building and maintaining an on-line community.** It is

important to point out

what telementoring is not.

It is not something that is "done" to someone else.

Students are not simply passive recipients of helpful information from informed individuals.

Essential to telementoring is discussion, be it one-on-one or in a large group. As a result much of the work is geared toward nurturing discussions that are not unilateral and mentoring environments where

students can safely discuss their school experiences. It is dynamic: discussions are born out of real everyday experiences. With these concepts in mind, on-line community is a cornerstone of the project.

**Mentor Lounge.** To prepare them for establishing relationships with young women in high school, all mentors participate in a series of on-line discussions over the course of two to four weeks

**"Students are not simply passive recipients of helpful information from informed individuals."**

**"There is also a noticeable impact on mentors, since they too become connected to a wider community of support..."**

before "meeting" students on-line.

Throughout the project, mentors continue to support each other on-line in the mentor lounge.

Although it is too early to gauge the overall effects of telementoring on participants, early work suggests that it offers a broad range of benefits for both students and mentors. During the first year of the program, students reported increased confidence in their abilities; decreased feelings of isolation; broadened awareness of career options; a sense of voice and empowerment in the classroom (students began to speak up about issues that arose in class); and unification (students became a support community for each other). There was also an unexpected result of the pilot year. Young women in the program actively recruited three times the average number of young women that typically enroll in their pre-engineering program—which was a record high for the school.

There is also a noticeable impact on mentors, since they too become connected to a wider community of support throughout the project. Benefits reported by mentors during the first year include

increased connection to young people; a broadening of their own career awareness; and increased knowledge of strategies for supporting workplace mentoring programs. They also reported a sense of fulfillment in being able to provide guidance and in participating in a program that makes community outreach possible.

*The Center for Children and Technology is based in New York City. If you are interested in being a mentor or know someone else who would*

*be interested, contact Naomi Hupert (nhupert@confer.edc.org) or visit the Telementoring website (<http://www.edc.org/CCT/telementoring>). For program information, contact Dorothy Bennett (dbennett@confer.edc.org).*



# Children's Express

Continued from page 12

pornography, they're going to look for it. It's there in the world, in cyberspace, on television and everywhere else. Adults, hopefully, will see that children are looking at this and will help

**"A young kid should have an adult with them."**

them understand what it's all about. This way, they can learn something about society from the material, instead of shutting it out so that it becomes a mystery. **Miller:** I would not let a 7-year-old kid walk down some New York City streets at night. It's the same thing in cyberspace. A young kid should have an adult with them. When they're older you give them more freedom, and, hopefully, they've learned enough to handle it.

**CE:** Will all this new technology give us less privacy?

**Miller:** It might, but what happens is really up to us. We have to decide how we are going to let the corporations use technology. If we're clear and we talk to the government and write letters and articles and protest, we can tell them what they can and cannot do with new technology.

*Children's Express reporters Sam Breier, 11; Emily Chuck, 11; Jessica Jacobson, 11; Joshua Kaplan, 12; Jacob Luce, 11; Rebecca Smith, 8 and Sarah Sticker, 9 contributed to this story.*

## Youth Agenda '96

Continued from page 11

far, have you heard your concerns addressed by politicians and the media?

**Siva:** No.

**Courtney:** Not as much as we would like.

**MNN:** What's it been like working on Youth Agenda '96?

**Courtney:** It's been fun. We've learned different things. This is such a great opportunity for us because not many young people get the chance to be future filmmakers.

**Antonio:** I've learned that television treats the public like they're little dogs. It's a rude awakening to see what the media is really trying to do to you.

**MNN:** What are you trying to do with the media?

**Antonio:** We didn't start out to trap viewers or manipulate people. We just started out to give the facts, have a voice and let ourselves be heard.

**Siva:** What I've learned is basically everything. From camera work to editing, from logging to dubbing. One thing that is also fun is working in a group. Together we all get to understand each other. We get to understand what each of us feels and what teenagers can do. The media is like a big ventriloquist and all of us are little puppets. What we try to do is to kill that ventriloquist so that we can put out our message up there on the big screen and show this is what the youth are all about. This is what the youth are doing.

**Anisah:** I am like that to my peers. I am an example, that I am doing something good. This way, they can't say that no one is out there doing any good, because I am.

*Victor Sanchez is Director of Education and Outreach for Manhattan Neighborhood Network.*

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# Mirror Project

Continued from page 7

while others speak into the hand-held microphone. Moving backwards, he crosses the parking lot and tells his friends to "move your behinds out of the way."

Back at the editing suite at SCAT, 16-year-old **Melinda** logs her tape and watches herself and her friend, **Samantha**. The girls talk about their photo album, working at Burger King, Melinda's poems, and about her absent father. Meanwhile the photocopy machine is making copies of the flyer advertising the latest Mirror Project premiere, which will take place at the Mystic Housing Recreation Center in the heart of the projects. **Kris Kay**, an intern, is faxing press releases to reporters from mainstream TV stations, the **Boston Globe** and the **Somerville Journal**.

"Coming from ethnic, racial and social groups marginalized in U.S. history, teen producers will premiere videos reflecting their own history straight from the source: themselves."

On the day of the screening, the room is filled with the young producers, their families and friends. **Cecily Miller**, Director of the **Somerville Arts Council**

and **Mark Smith**, Program Coordinator from the **Mass Cultural Council** are there. The next day, when I turned on the TV to SCAT's Channel 3, I saw the teenagers I see everyday at the Mystic housing projects.

In videotaping our lives we discover that we are the experts of our own life, and as such, it is our responsibility to educate ourselves and others. We strive to capture and share meaningful moments of our lives, because as some of us may have already realized, airwaves, households, and the brains of most earthlings have been invaded by the thinking of media corporations lacking talent and social responsibility. On the other hand, at The Mirror Project we have produced over 90 videos. They are truth; the symbol of our struggle. They emerge as spontaneous reflections—"mirrors"—of how the teenagers perceive their world. They reflect the diversity of the participants and

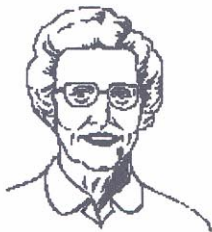
the range of their imaginations. Often the producers celebrate what seems positive and strong in themselves; sometimes they illuminate what scares them.

Cumulatively, the videos expose an unfolding view of the housing projects and other Somerville communities as vivid and lively, while not masking the harsh realities of an impoverished environment. The Mirror Project is an attitude that has been many places in the nation and around the globe. We have reached the brains and hearts of many people. That is what we call communication. When people honestly see and are in

touch with themselves and others, they will play an active role in shaping their lives and their history.

*Roberto Arévalo is Project Director for the Mirror Project at Somerville Community Access Television in Somerville, Massachusetts.*

**"...teen producers will premiere videos reflecting their own history straight from the source: themselves."**



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# Growing Brains Need More Than Just TV

Continued from page 17

lost childhood opportunities are, unfortunately, irreplaceable.

**2. Brains need a lot of time with language.** Our current massive societal change from pencil and paper to the visual screen has been compared to the time in ancient Greece when the oral storytelling tradition was left behind in favor of the newer forms of reading and writing. In light of how the human brain functions, this analogy is not at all accurate.

The Greeks made a transition from oral language, a brain activity requiring symbolic processing, to written language, another brain activity requiring symbolic processing. Although aspects of long-term memory were lost when the oral tradition was lost, the human cerebral cortex basically stayed intact and continued to be able to master higher forms of abstract thought.

Today, as children sit passively in front of picture visuals more often than they do anything else, they are making a transition away from symbolic processing entirely. Visual images on a screen activate the reptilian and limbic systems. No mental gymnastics are required to interpret them. They arrive. They are there. Language, on the other hand, whether oral or written, requires heavy-duty thinking. Because of its symbolic form, its meaning has to be "unlocked." Words on a computer screen are processed by the brain very differently from images on that same screen. It's not the screens, per se, or even the visual abundance that are worrisome. It's the filling of children's attention with *picture* visuals and displacing time spent with symbols that's alarming. Why? Because symbolic processing, i.e., language, is absolutely necessary to develop thinking. *In fact, there is no mind without language.*

**3. Brains need mental challenges.** Ever wonder why educational high-quality programs don't draw as wide an audience as does fast paced, violent content?

Much of it has to do with how the brain functions. Fast-moving screen violence "triggers" the reptilian and limbic systems while squelching the cerebral cortex. These "rapid-fire" images don't give much time for the cerebral cortex to

engage since it doesn't operate as fast as the other systems. It takes time to think and to formulate ideas. Therefore, an educational television program requires more concentration and mental effort—especially for children because their cortical functioning is not fully developed. Fast paced shows, on the other hand, require little mental effort—making them easier to watch (even for adults!).

But human brains rely on continual mental challenge for growth. **Dr. Marian Diamond**, brain researcher from the **University of California**, has found that the structure of cells in the brain's cortex physically changes as a result of sustained intellectual exercise, with individual neurons developing more connective links (dendrites) to other neurons.

By allowing children unlimited access to screens while demanding less time in challenging activities, parents unintentionally contribute to a state of deprivation—seriously affecting the rate and quality of children's brain growth. And, by not using TV and video in the home to challenge children's thinking, we are missing golden opportunities to use the medium to support children's cognitive development.

**What to do?** Video technology can be child-friendly and brain compatible. First of all, children do not have to become habituated to it. By consciously **balancing other activities in children's lives**, parents take the first step in teaching what it means to be "media literate"—using media appropriately for personal intention, rather than out of sheer habit. Other steps parents can take include:

- ♦ Talk with children about screen images and their purposes. Parents can set up challenging brain experiences by asking spontaneous questions while the family watches TV. They can elicit critical thinking by teaching children to make sound decisions about when and what they'll watch.

- ♦ Encourage children to take television into their own hands by participating in "hands on" learning through their local public access television facility. Better

yet, parents can join their children in learning television production and developing their own television program for the local cable access channel.

In short, parents can put video technology in its proper place in the family—in support of needs of the developing child. In doing so, parents can make enormous strides in nurturing LITERACY—both language and media literacy.

*Gloria DeGaetano, M.Ed., is Director of Train of Thought Counseling in Redmond, Washington. This article was adapted by the author's permission from her book **Television and the Lives of Our Children: A Manual for Teachers and Parents.***

## Alliance News 1997 International Conference & Trade Show

The 1997 International Conference and Trade Show will be held July 9–12, 1997 at the **Milwaukee Hilton**. Call (202) 393-2650 for information.

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The Editorial Board of the Alliance for Community Media meets via conference call every third Thursday at noon eastern to discuss the progress of upcoming issues of *Community Media Review*.

If you or someone you know would like to participate in the Editorial Board, perhaps even be Editor-in-Chief of an upcoming issue, contact Editorial Board Chair **Dirk Koning** at **GRTV**, 50 Library Plaza NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503-3219. Phone: (616) 459-4788 ext. 101; fax: (616) 459-3970 ext. 123; or e-mail: [dirk@grcmc.org](mailto:dirk@grcmc.org)



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# Video Machete

Continued from page 14

a history and particular (self) interest. For discussion, we use the mainstream media as a jumping off point to analyze our local communities. By identifying how the media represents the world, we strategize our own media interventions. Through experiments with video production, we test and practice our theories. This

dialogue between practical production skills and critical work about cultural and media is at the heart of Video Machete's project.

An essential characteristic of our conception of media education is cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration. We work to create an atmosphere where each member can grow and enact new identities, different from work, school, and other peer groups. From diverse backgrounds, we have much to learn and offer to one another and the process is, of course, fraught with interior and group struggles

around all the internalized barriers including racism, sexism, classism and ageism. Through the acknowledgment of these barriers, we constantly question and re-define who we are instead of leaving each other intact inside of hierarchical, static identities such as "youth" and "adult."

Our current projects include documentary videotapes which provide a space for community dialogue about gangs by representing diverse perspectives on Latino gangs in the barrios of **Pilsen, Humbolt Park, Logan Square, and West Town** in Chicago. It will also include a critical analysis of mainstream media representations of gangs, and a social, economic, and historical analysis of Latino gangs. Several members of the group are working on autobiographical video portraits. *Homenaje a Marco Cordova* was the first of these completed. When Marco was murdered while this work was in progress the experience emphasized the urgency of all of the autobiographical projects. Among those in production is *El Campo y the City*, the story of **Nydia Hernandez** and her family and their alternating moves between rural Puerto Rico and Chicago.

*Dalida Maria Benfield is a member of the collective Video Machete in Chicago, Illinois.*

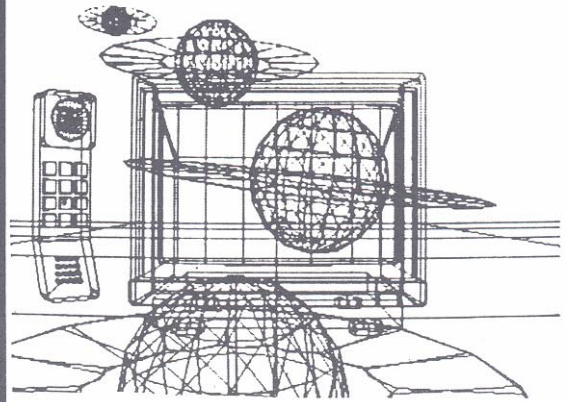
## High Tech Classroom

Continued from page 9

mented curriculum, a great opportunity will be lost if technology goes unused. I have seen students working together in cyberspace to solve problems and build community. I have seen the future, and I like the view!

*J. Michael Pabian, Jr. is vice principal of East Somerville Community School in Somerville, Massachusetts.*

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